The Benefit of the Doubt

Edith was a lanky girl, seemingly quiet. She by no means shared Zoe's love of dancing and various sports. Edith lived on the other side of town, and the two girls might never have met, had Edith's elderly grandmother not lived next door to Zoe's own family.

It started with a football, kicked over the garden fence by Zoe's younger brother, Brian, which resulted in the initial brief exchange between Zoe and Edith.

Afterwards, Brian asked Zoe why she had talked to "that weird girl".

"Because my idiot of a brother kicked a ball over the fence, and I was asking her for it back. And how do you know she's 'weird'?"

Brian shrugged. "She just is. Everyone says so."

"Who's 'everyone'? John Peterson and Anthony Turner?" This with a knowing grin.

"Amongst others," said Brian. "I wouldn't talk to her, that's all I'm saying. Unless you're into making friends with weirdos."

"Probably enough that I have one as a brother."

"Very funny. Yeah, well - don't say I didn't warn you about Edith, anyway."

"You know her name then. You seem very informed about this 'weirdo'."

It turned out that Zoe's best friends, Tanya and Stephanie, shared Brian's misgivings about Edith, but still, not one of them had substantiated their opinions.

Paradoxically, this hostility towards the girl actually inspired Zoe to make an effort. Get to know Edith, who was initially not forthcoming, but who gradually chatted with Zoe.

Edith was, it transpired, the youngest of seven, and the only girl, but she wouldn't talk much about her family. The red flags were present in abundance, all along. And Zoe should have walked away, before it was too late. Yet, she opted to give Edith the benefit of the doubt.